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Организация  
Объединенных Наций по  
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منظمة الأمم المتحدة  
للتربية والعلم والثقافة

联合国教育、  
科学及文化组织

**UNESCO's contribution to the to the UN Secretary General's fifth annual progress report on the implementation of the Brussels Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) for the Decade 2001-2010**

**23 March 2007**

## Summary

The present report, prepared by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), is submitted in accordance with General Assembly resolutions 60/228 and Economic and Social Council resolution 2006/51. It is a contribution to the annual progress report on the implementation of the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) for the Decade 2001-2010 for the 2007 substantive session of ECOSOC and subsequently to the United Nations General Assembly, and presents an overview of the progress of LDC in meeting the education-related goals in the Brussels Programme of Action (Goals 7, 8 and 9). It follows UNESCO's contribution to the mid-term global review of the implementation of the Brussels Declaration and Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) for the Decade 2001-2010.

**Goal 7: Ensuring that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to and complete free and compulsory primary education of good quality (Millennium Development Goal 2), Target 3**

At the 2000 Millennium Summit, the international community made the commitment to achieve universal primary education (UPE) by 2015. This goal is also part of the six Education for All (EFA) goals adopted by world leaders in 2000 at the World Education Forum. Access to and completion of primary education plays a crucial role in enabling children to develop the necessary skills to participate and succeed in the rapidly changing world of the new millennium.

A key indicator used to measure progress towards UPE is the net enrolment rate for primary education (NER). To attain this MDG goal, countries must come close to a primary NER of 100%. The analysis here covers the period from 1991 to 2005.

In the last fifteen years, substantial progress has been made in bringing more children to school. The regional primary NER increased by about 20 percentage points between 1991 and 2005, two-thirds of this progress has been made since 1999. However, considerable efforts are still required to achieve UPE in the LDCs. In the school year ending in 2005, about one child in three was out of school (Primary NER of 73%).

Although participation levels remain relatively low for both sexes, girls have less access to education than boys. There are around nine girls enrolled out of ten boys on average. This gap has been slightly reduced over the last fifteen years (GPI<sup>1</sup> of 0.85).

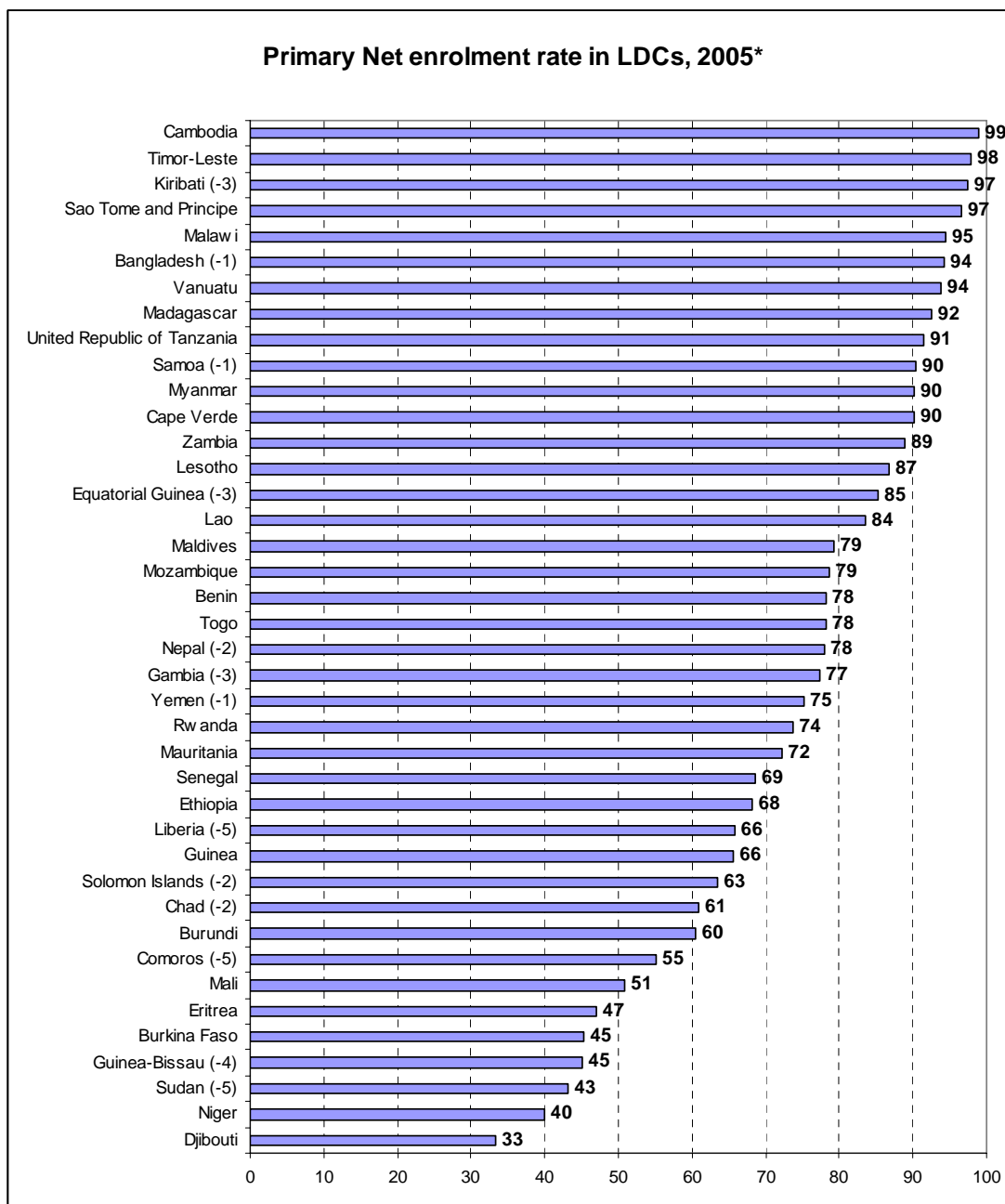
At the country level, of the LDCs for which data is available, only five countries have NERs above 95%, namely Cambodia, Timor-Leste, Kiribati, Sao Tome and Principe and Malawi. However, the vast majority of LDCs are still far from achieving the goal. Half of the countries in LDCs have NERs below 80%. The situation is critical in countries where less than one out of two children has no access to primary education: Djibouti (33%), Niger (40%), Sudan (43%), Guinea-Bissau and Burkina Faso (45%) and Eritrea (47%).

Some countries have made dramatic improvements during the last five years. The NER has increased by more than 20 percentage points in Tanzania, Madagascar, Ethiopia, Benin, Lesotho, Mozambique, Zambia and Guinea. This was largely due to an increase in girls' enrolment in most of the countries. In contrast, participation fell by 18 percentage points in the Maldives and more than 8 percentage points in Cape Verde.

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<sup>1</sup> GPI: Gender parity index defined as ratio of girls to boys. Gender parity is considered achieved when the GPI value is between 0.97 and 1.03.

The LDCs still need to make substantial efforts to achieve universal primary education. Overall, around 29 million primary school age children were not enrolled in 2005, 10 million less than in 1999. Girls represent around 55% of children out of school. More than one million out of school children live in Ethiopia, Sudan, Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso. Some countries without publishable data like Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Somalia are likely to be in a similar situation.



\*: (-/+ n) = number of years before or ahead of 2005

Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2007.

Data on primary NERs are missing in all years in the period 1999-2005 for the following countries: Afghanistan, Angola, Bhutan, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Haiti, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Tuvalu and Uganda.

**Goal 8: Achieving a 50 per cent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults**

Overall in the LDCs, the level of literacy is very low amongst the adult population. Slightly more than half of the adults are literate (53%). However, literacy rates improved in all the countries with two data points during the past fifteen years. A few countries improved their literacy rates from the 1990 census cycle by more than half, including Burundi and Burkina Faso. Chad has even doubled its literacy rate for the same period. In the Central Africa Republic, Senegal and Nepal, the literacy rate increased by more than 40%.

There is, however, considerable variation between countries, with adult literacy rates ranging from 19% in Mali to 96% in the Maldives. In three out of four countries with data, the rates are still below 70%. Amongst them, 13 countries reported more than half of the adult population as illiterate. Guinea, Niger, Afghanistan, Chad, Burkina Faso and Mali all have literacy rates below 30%.

The international community is particularly concerned with illiteracy among women. Literacy is a fundamental skill empowering women to take control of their own lives, to engage directly with authority and to gain access to the wider world of learning. In half of the countries with data, the GPI is below 0.75, meaning that less than three women are literate for every four literate men. Only one country (Maldives) has achieved gender parity in literacy, and only one other country (Myanmar) has a GPI above 0.90. In contrast, Lesotho reported more literate women than men.

The situation of women is particularly worrying in Afghanistan, Chad, Niger, Guinea, Mali, Mozambique and Benin where less than one woman is literate for every two literate men. In all of these countries, the literacy rate is particularly low for both men and women.

It should be noted that considerable progress has been reported in some countries since 1990. In these countries, notably Burkina Faso, Sao Tome and Principe, Tanzania, Bangladesh, Nepal, Burundi and Malawi, the gender gap has been reduced by more than 10 percentage points.

Around 190 million adults are illiterate in the LDCs, which represents one out of four adults who are illiterate worldwide. Bangladesh represents 23% of this total, and 26 countries with recent data have more than one million people who are illiterate. Overall in LDCs, women represent 60% of the total illiterate population. This percentage reaches up to 76% in Equatorial Guinea and more than 70% in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Cambodia, Angola and Sao Tome and Principe.

In order to meet the literacy challenge, political leaders from the highest levels must commit themselves to action and to ensuring that clear government policies include literacy in education sector plans and other relevant documents, such as United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks (UNDAFs) and Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers. Public spending devoted to literacy must be bolstered to support adult literacy programmes, to implement policies that support literate environments, and to professionalize literacy educators and provide them with adequate pay and training. Typically only 1% of public spending on education goes towards literacy programmes, yet the goal is essential to achieving the Six EFA Goals and the MDGs.<sup>2</sup>

It is also important for governments to define who will be responsible for adult literacy, which is often scattered across several different ministries, and to create partnerships with civil society organizations, relevant UN agencies and various other actors to ensure widespread momentum for achieving literate societies.

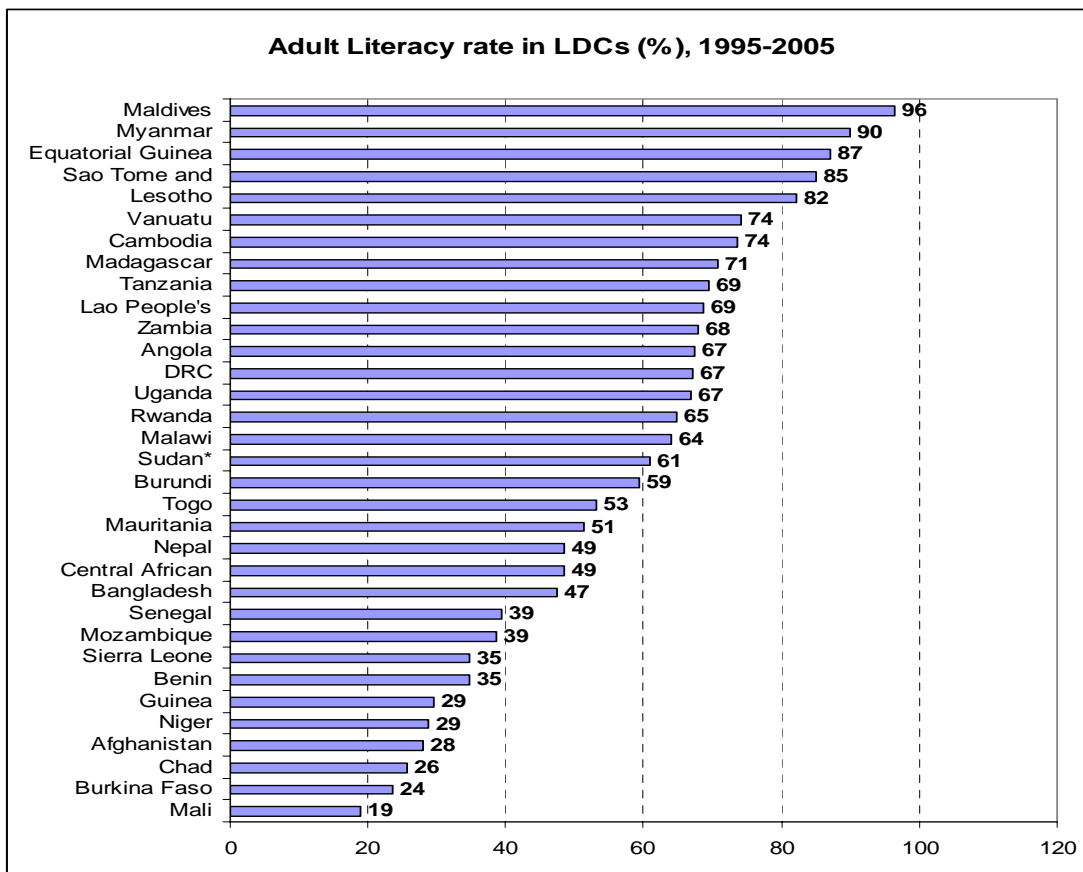
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<sup>2</sup> 2006 Education for All Global Monitoring Report

One initiative that is reaching out to governments in LDCs to assist them in assessing their literacy needs and providing literacy learning opportunities is UNESCO's Literacy Initiative for Empowerment (LIFE)<sup>3</sup>. Currently, 23 out of the 50 LDCs are participating in LIFE, namely Djibouti, Mauritania, Yemen, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Haiti, Benin, Burkina Faso, Central African Republic, Chad, Democratic Republic of Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Madagascar, Mali, Mozambique, Niger, Senegal and Sierra Leone.

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<sup>3</sup> For further information about LIFE, please refer to the LIFE website at:  
[http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-URL\\_ID=42853&URL\\_DO=DO\\_TOPIC&URL\\_SECTION=201.html](http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-URL_ID=42853&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html)

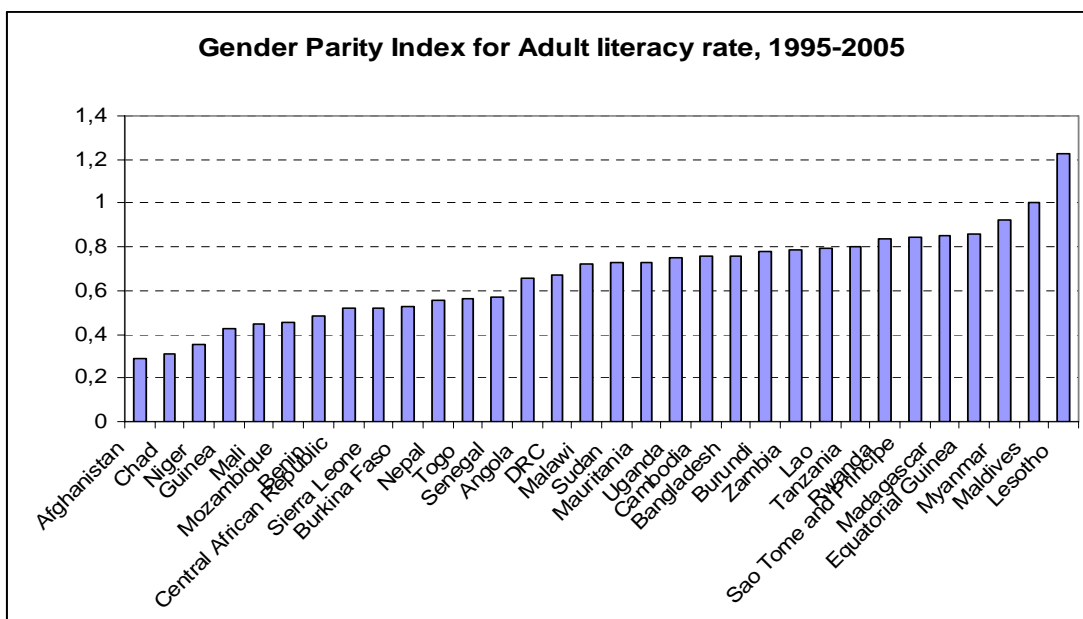


Note: For the reference period 1995-2005, data are not available for 17 countries.

Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2007.

Data on adult literacy rates are not available for the following countries: Bhutan, Cape Verde, Comoros, Djibouti, Eritrea, Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Haiti, Kiribati, Liberia, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Somalia, Timor-Leste, Tuvalu and Yemen.

\* North Sudan only



Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2007.

**Goal 9: Eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and achieving gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls' full and equal access to education and achievement in basic education of good quality (Millennium Development Goal 3, Target 4)**

Gender parity in terms of participation in each level of education has been identified as a priority at both national and international levels. In the Millennium Declaration initiative the goal is for all countries to eliminate gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005 and at all levels of education by 2015. One indicator used to measure progress towards gender parity in education is the ratio of female to male enrolment rates by level of education (the gender parity index, GPI, of the gross enrolment ratio for the relevant level of education). A GPI rating which is close to 1.00 indicates parity.<sup>4</sup>

**Primary education:**

The LDCs as a whole have missed the 2005 parity target in terms of primary education enrolment. In 2005, there were 89 girls per 100 boys enrolled in primary education. Nevertheless, there has been substantial progress during the last fifteen years. In 1991, the same rating was at 79 girls enrolled per 100 boys.

In 2005, the GPI ranged from a low of 0.59 in Afghanistan to 1.02 in Rwanda, Kiribati, Myanmar and Malawi. Along with these later countries, eight others have reached gender parity at the primary education level, including: Mauritania: Lesotho, Uganda, Samoa, Sao Tome and Principe, Maldives, Vanuatu and Senegal. In contrast, 19 countries have a GPI below the average for the LDCs (0.90). Some of them are far from achieving parity, having a GPI below 0.70: Yemen, Niger, Chad, the Central African Republic and Afghanistan. In all countries, overall gender disparities in primary enrolment are overwhelmingly to the disadvantage of girls.

While the gender gap in primary enrolment persists, most of the countries have significantly reduced the disparities since the 1990s. Progress exceeded 10 percentage points in 19 countries, amongst them Yemen, Guinea, Benin, Nepal, Mauritania, Senegal and Chad, which improved by more than 20 percentage points. On the other hand, Afghanistan and the Central African Republic lost more than 10 percentage points for the same period.

**Secondary education:**

The ongoing priority accorded to universal primary education is now intensifying demand for secondary education in many countries. But boys and girls are not equally benefiting from the resulting expansion in schooling, as seen in the greater variation between primary and secondary enrolment levels in general.

Overall in the LDCs, the GPI at secondary education is much lower than for primary. It has shown only marginal change - from 0.77 to 0.81 – during the past six years where girls are at a disadvantage. Nevertheless, there has been substantial progress for some countries, with the GPI rising by more than 10 percentage points between 1999 and 2005. These countries include Nepal, Guinea, Uganda, Mauritania, Yemen, Malawi, Togo and Senegal. In contrast, five other countries have seen the GPI decreasing for the same period. The decrease was more than 10 percentage points in Rwanda.

Girls continue to face considerable barriers in the majority of countries as they are still far from even approaching gender parity. In addition, participation in secondary education remains very low in the LDCs. This largely reflects the greater priority given to primary education rather than expanding access to the secondary level.

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<sup>4</sup> Due to the margins of error in the survey and administrative data, values approaching 1.00 - as opposed to the precise figure – can also indicate gender parity in terms of enrolment in a given level of education. The range of 0.97-1.03 is commonly considered to reflect parity.

Only two countries, Myanmar and Timor-Leste, have achieved gender parity at the secondary education level, compared to 12 countries at the primary level. There is considerable variation in GPI ratings between the countries: from 0.33 in Afghanistan to 1.26 in Lesotho (suggesting a disadvantage for boys in Lesotho). Four other countries experience disparity in regards to boys at the secondary education level, including Kiribati, Samoa, Sao Tome and Principe and Cape Verde.

Overall, girls are less likely than boys to be enrolled in secondary schools. It is important to note that the disparities against girls are not only more common across the region but are more extreme than those for boys.

### **Tertiary education:**

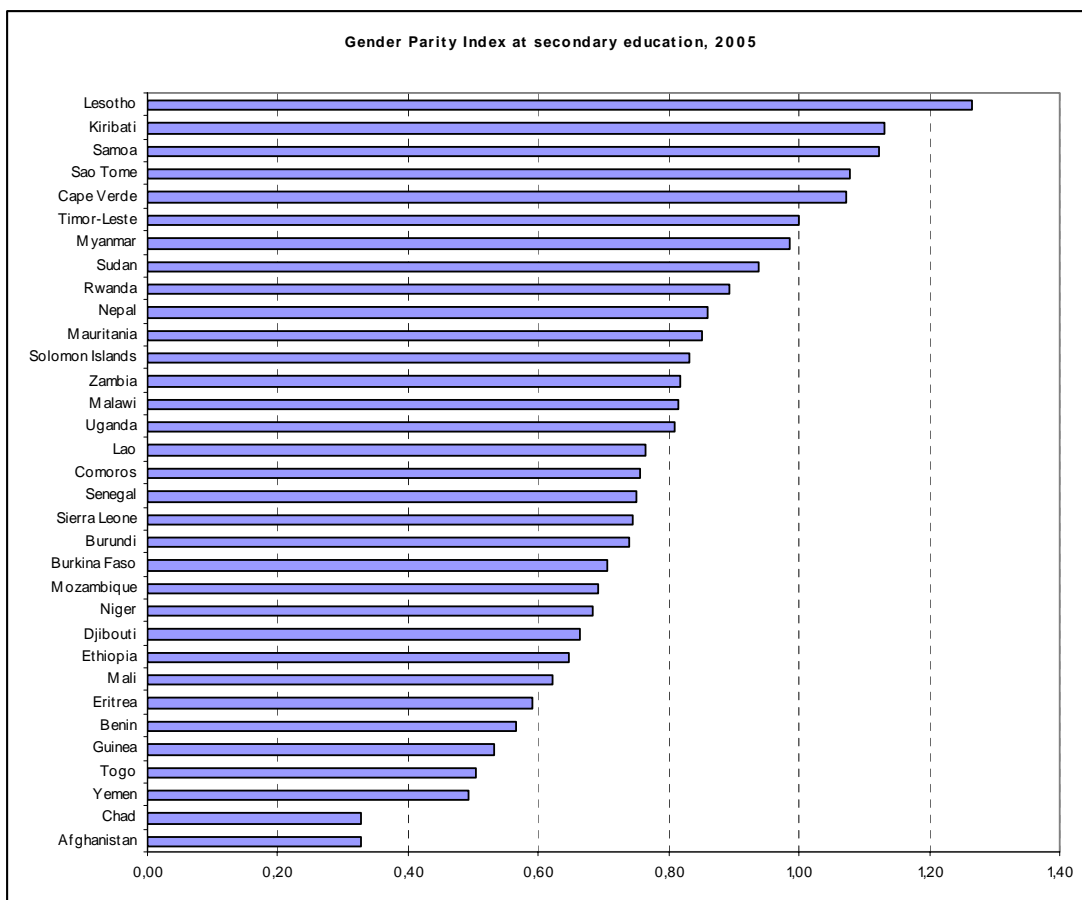
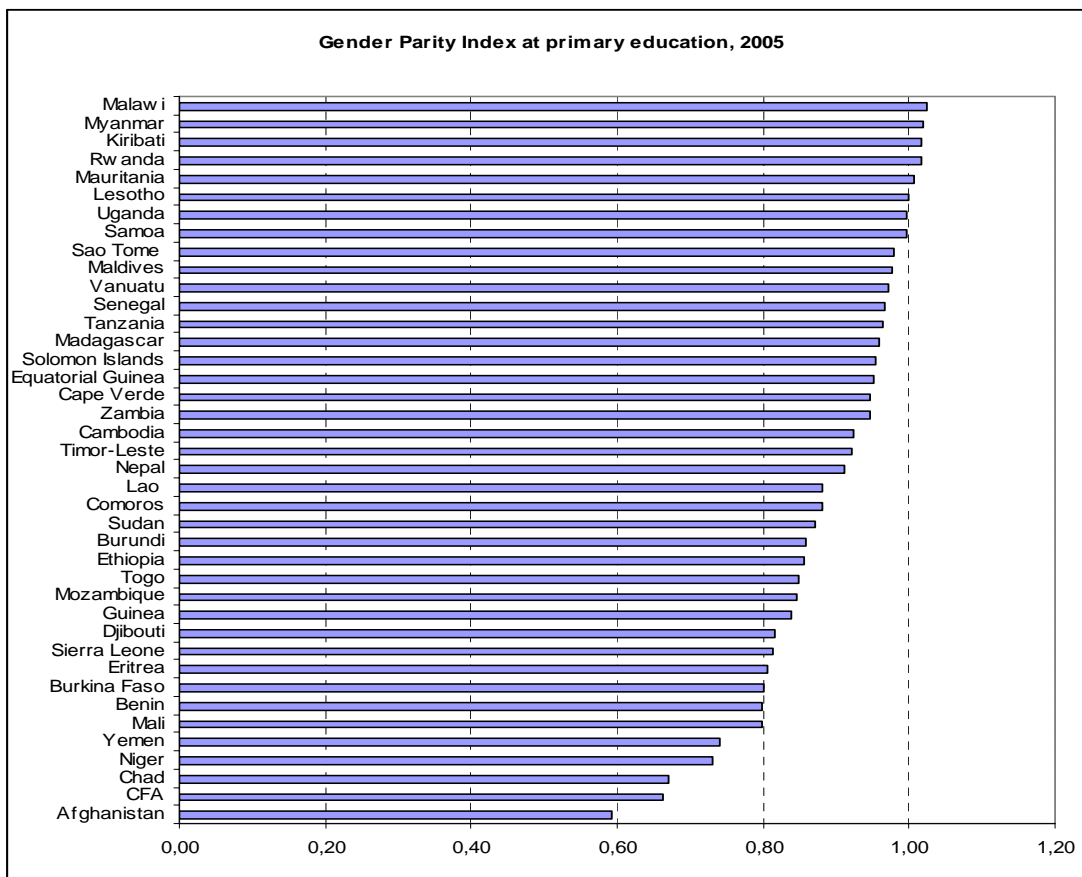
Participation in tertiary education has increased slightly since 1999. At the same time, the progress of women in achieving parity with men has been very slow. Across the LDCs as a whole, their share in tertiary enrolment rose from 0.57% to 0.63% between 1999 and 2005.

Yet there is considerable variation between the countries. They reported a GPI rating from 0.14 in Chad to 1.27 in Lesotho, reflecting disparities that favour women in the latter country. It should be noted that participation in tertiary education is very low for both men and women in these countries.

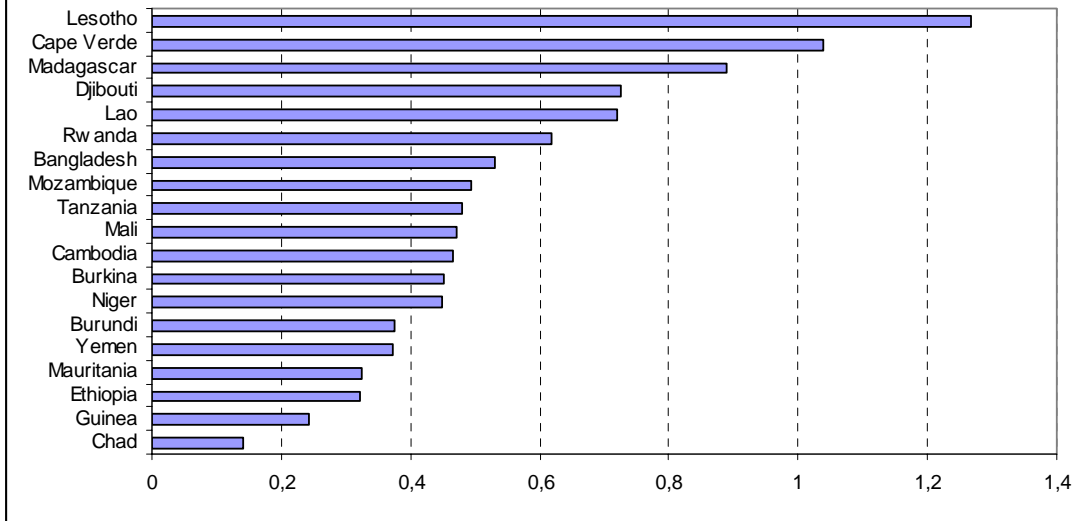
No country has reached parity at the tertiary education level. Except for Lesotho and Cape Verde, all the other countries with data experience disparities that favour men. The GPI in all these latter countries is below 0.90. For two-thirds of them, it is even below 0.50, meaning that for every two men enrolled at tertiary education there is only one women enrolled.

The greatest progress was reported in Mali and Tanzania, where the GPI rose by around 30 percentage points between 1999 and 2005. Across the LDCs, Cape Verde is the closest to achieving gender parity with an index rating of 1.04.





Gender Parity Index at tertiary education, 2005



**Conclusion:**

Over the past fifteen years, there has been a strong move towards greater gender parity, particularly at the primary level, where the ratio of girls to boys enrolled improved from 0.79% to 0.89% on average for LDCs. Girls' enrolment has increased enormously. But in many countries, girls continue to face considerable discrimination in access to schooling. Many countries with data did not reach gender parity in primary and secondary education.

Problems affecting gender equality in education include constraints in the family and within society that affect girls' access to school. Policy must address the circumstances and attitudes of parents if all girls are to have the chance to learn. The 2005 gender parity target was missed; international action must be reinforced to achieve UPE and gender parity. School systems must take girls' specific needs into account through curricula, teaching methods and the learning environment. School fees also act as a major barrier to schooling, for both girls and boys, therefore particular attention should be paid to reducing or eliminating school fees.

Special attention should also be given to promoting youth and adult literacy programmes; increasing the teacher supply and improving teacher training; expanding enrolments in early childhood care and education programmes, especially for the disadvantaged; implementing low-cost school health and nutrition measures that can increase access and learning; and ensuring adequate and appropriate learning opportunities to disadvantaged groups in LDCs, such as ethnic and linguistic minorities, remote and rural populations, indigenous peoples and nomads, disabled persons, street children, and people affected by HIV & AIDS.

It is important that the educational needs of LDCs receive the attention they deserve and all the support, both internal and external, that they require. Success in attaining the MDGs and the six EFA goals depends, above all, on the efforts, commitment and resources (human, material and financial) of the LDCs themselves, but additional support from the international community and development partners will make a critical difference. In this regard, the international community should strengthen its focus on EFA needs and disparities in LDCs through existing international mechanisms such as the EFA Fast Track Initiative (EFA-FTI), the UN Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI), and the EFA Global Action Plan (GAP).